Sviatoslav Sakharnov

Wondrous Ships

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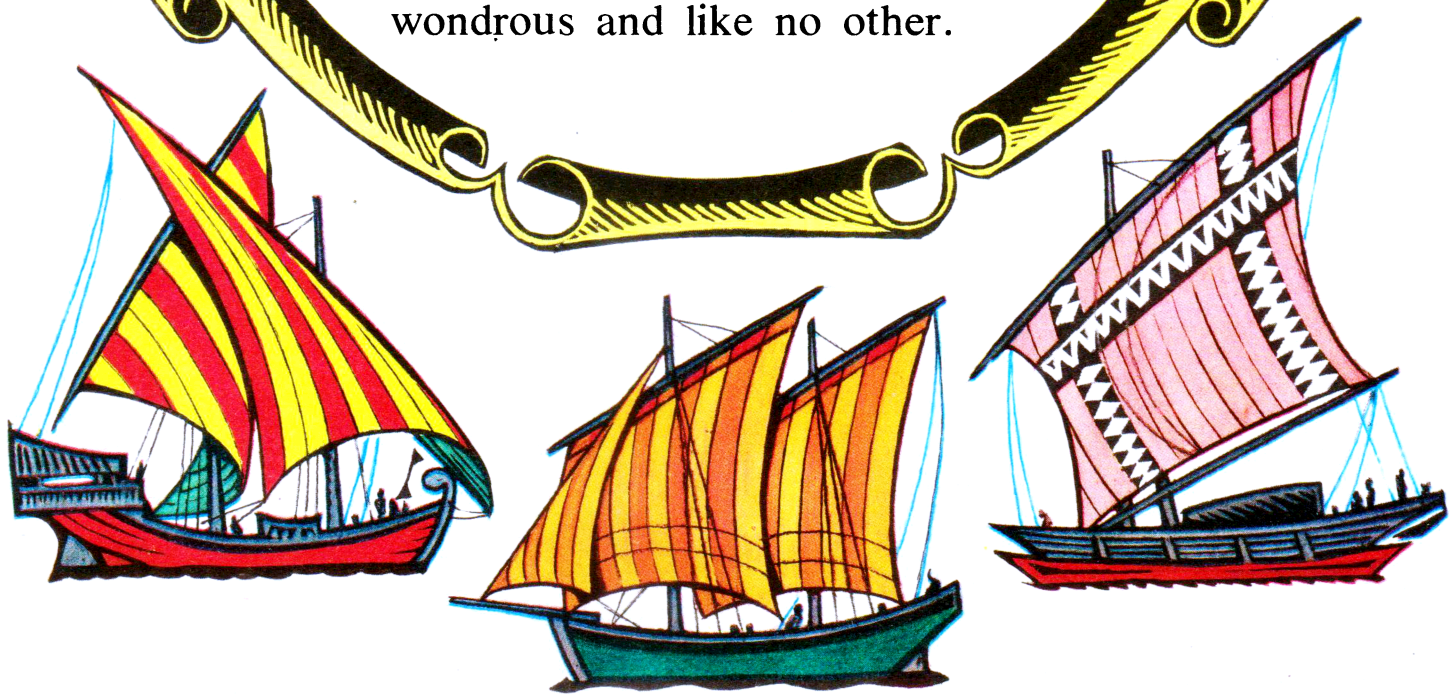
Ships ply the seven seas. They puff and chug, and the waves slap against their sides as they hurry on their different ways.

One has a tall smokestack, another has a squat one. Some can pull three barges along easily, while others can barely get themselves moving. Each one is different.

Their stories are different, too. Ships are like people, each one wondrous and like no other.



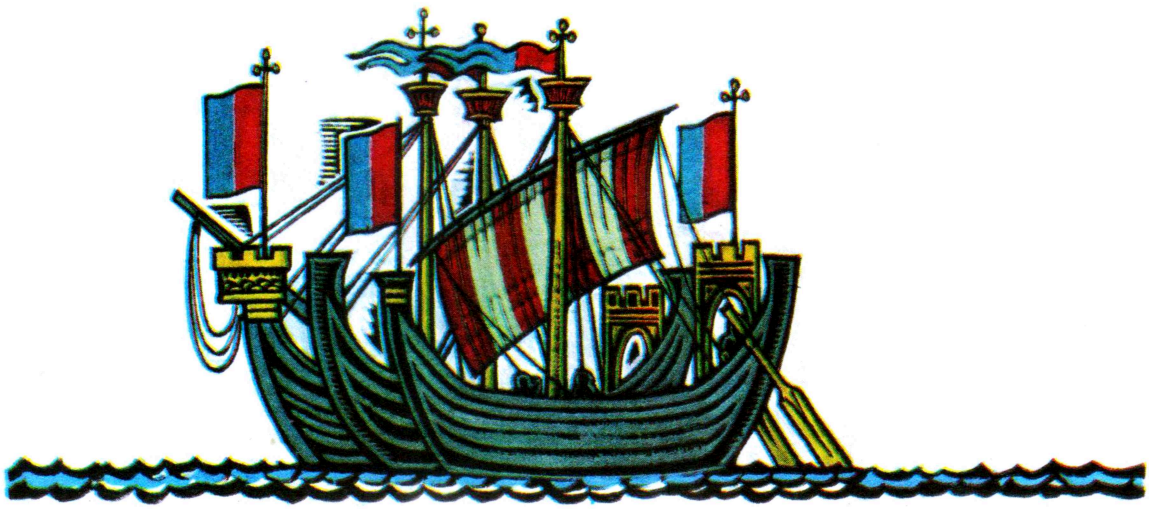
DRAGON HEADS

Long, long ago the ships of the sea robbers known as Vikings plied the cold waters of the Norwegian Sea. Each ship had a carved wooden snake or dragon's head on its prow.

Once, after raiding a coastal village, some of the ships were caught in a storm. The wind drove them westward. The vessels were tossed about by the waves until at last they sighted land. They could see green dells between the black mountains ahead. The men had been at sea for so long that this land seemed like a blossoming haven to them. And so they named it Greenland. They settled there and some set out for the shores of America from Greenland.

Not every ship returned from those distant journeys, but there were some that had crossed the ocean several times.

When a Viking chieftain died his ship was buried beside him, for the Vikings believed that there was no journey from which a stout ship would not bring you back home.

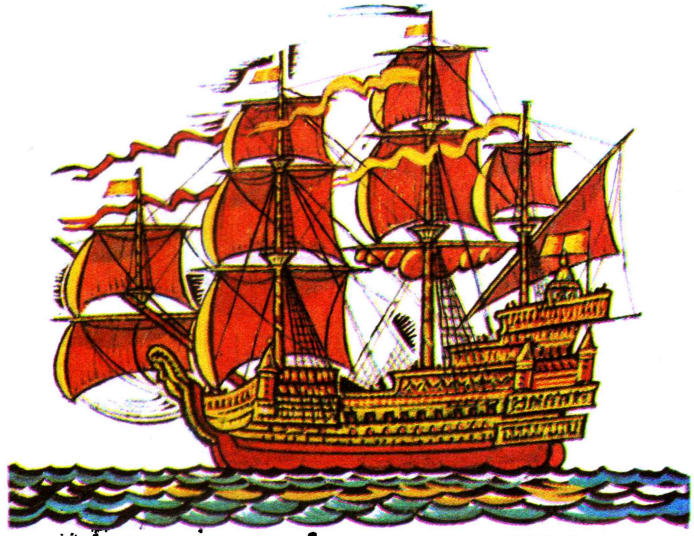


THE CARAVELS

When Columbus said he would cross the ocean he was told, "The Earth ends on the other side of the ocean. The ocean ends there, too, and the water falls into a chasm with a terrible roar. Anyone who manages to escape being carried over the edge and turns around will die of hunger or disease on the way back anyway."

However, Columbus would not be talked out of his journey. His three caravels set out for the open sea. These were small vessels with broad bows and high carved poops. During bad storms when the waves were very high, they lost sight of each other. But the caravels pushed onward stubbornly. Columbus crossed the ocean and discovered the New World, America.

This meant the world was as round as a ball. Columbus' brave crews had travelled round the world in sailing ships.



THE SHIP THAT ONLY SAILED A DAY

The King of Sweden summoned his shipbuilders and said, "I want to have the biggest, fastest, mightiest and most beautiful ship in the world."

"But, Your Majesty," the shipbuilders protested.

"No buts about it!"

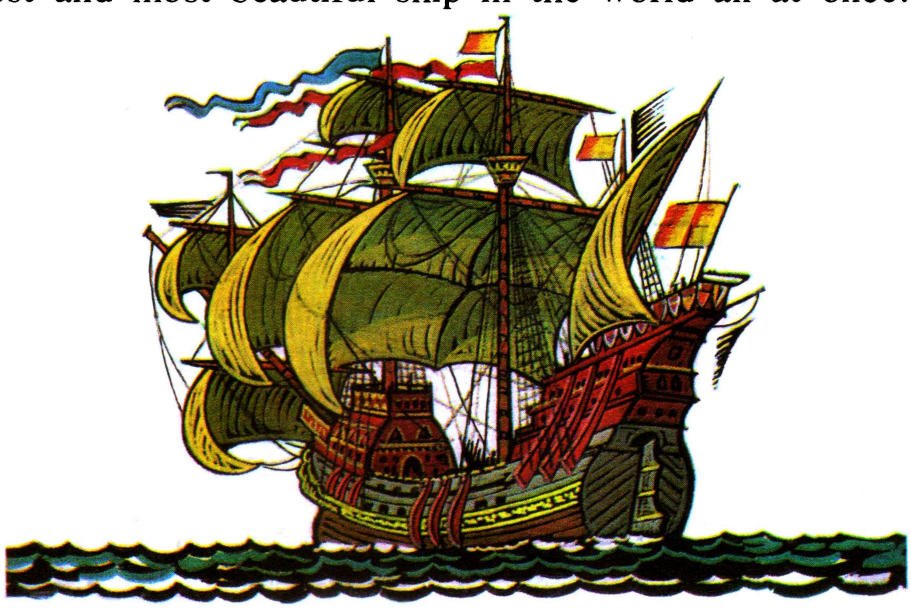
His shipbuilders built him such a ship. Its decks were lined with cannons, its masts rose high and mighty, its sides were beautifully carved, and the cabins were magnificent. The ship was christened the *Gustavas Vasa.*

"Let's see how seaworthy it is," the old sailors said.

The *Gustavas Vasa* was launched, but when it sailed off a bit, it turned upside-down!

Three hundred years later the ship was raised from the bottom of the sea and permanently moored in the harbour.

After all, a ship could not be expected to be the biggest, fastest, mightiest and most beautiful ship in the world all at once.



THE VICTORY'S LAST BATTLE

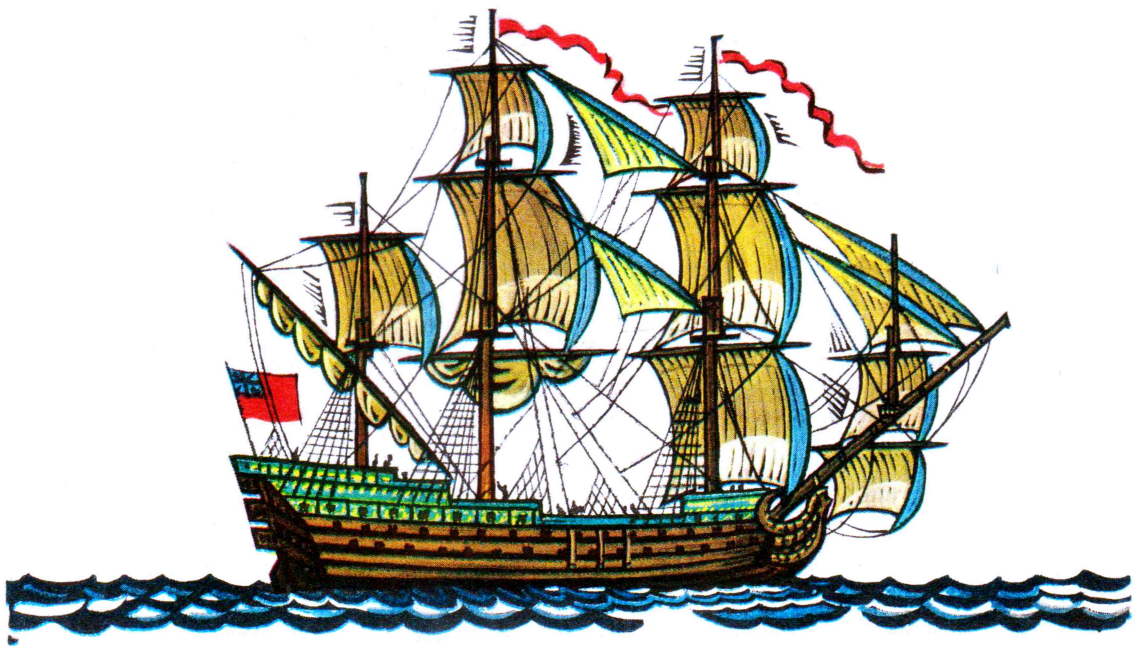
During the Battle of Trafalgar the British Fleet under Admiral Nelson defeated the French Fleet.

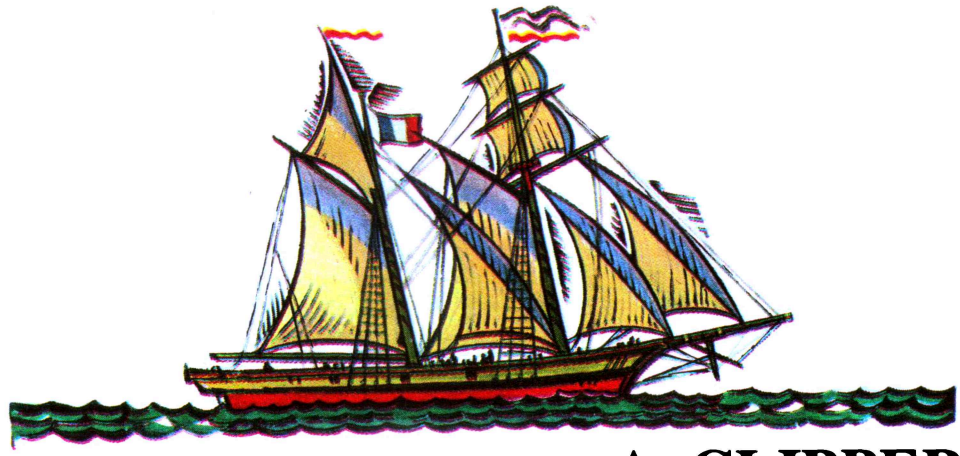
Admiral Nelson had lost the sight of one eye. Once, having received an order to retreat, but deciding to fight on, he put his telescope to his blind eye and said, "I cannot see the signal."

The British won the Battle of Trafalgar, but Admiral Nelson was mortally wounded and died on board his ship, the *Victory*.

The ship headed towards England, its tattered sails billowing in the wind.

There Admiral Nelson was buried. His flagship remained faithful to the end. The *Victory* was permanently moored, never to sail under another admiral.





A CLIPPER SHIP

A steamship was plying the sea. It was a large, fast ship. Suddenly a white spot appeared on the far horizon. It kept getting bigger and bigger. The captain raised his binoculars to his eyes and saw it was a three-masted clipper. Its white sails were billowing, and it was quickly overtaking his ship.

The captain was not one to be left behind by anyone.

"Full steam ahead!" he said.

Smoke poured out of the smokestack. But the sailing ship was gaining on them quickly.

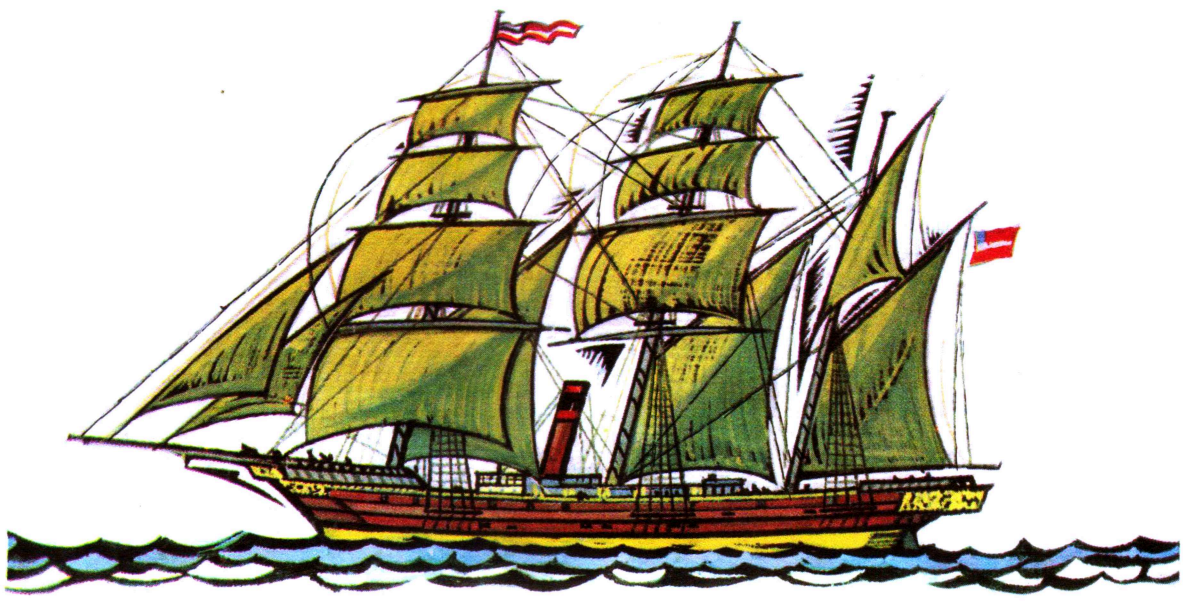
"Full steam ahead!" the captain roared.

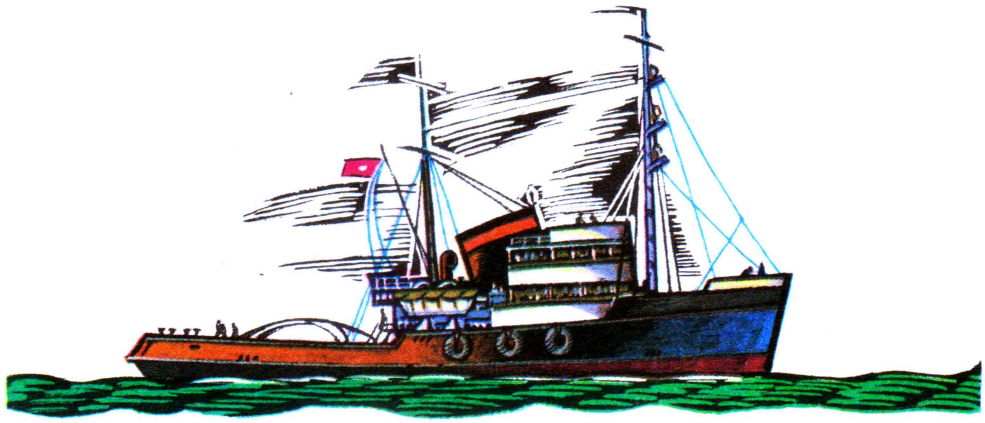
The smokestack was belching smoke by now. The ship's propeller churned up water.

The clipper was soon behind them. It was passing the steamship now and leaving it behind. An hour later it was so far ahead they lost sight of it.

As it passed them the captain of the steamship read the clipper's name. It was the *Cutty Sark*. This was the fastest of all the sailing ships ever.

The *Cutty Sark* is now permanently moored in London harbour. Its hull is weatherbeaten and its sails are worn, but its sharp, long bow still looks to the sea.





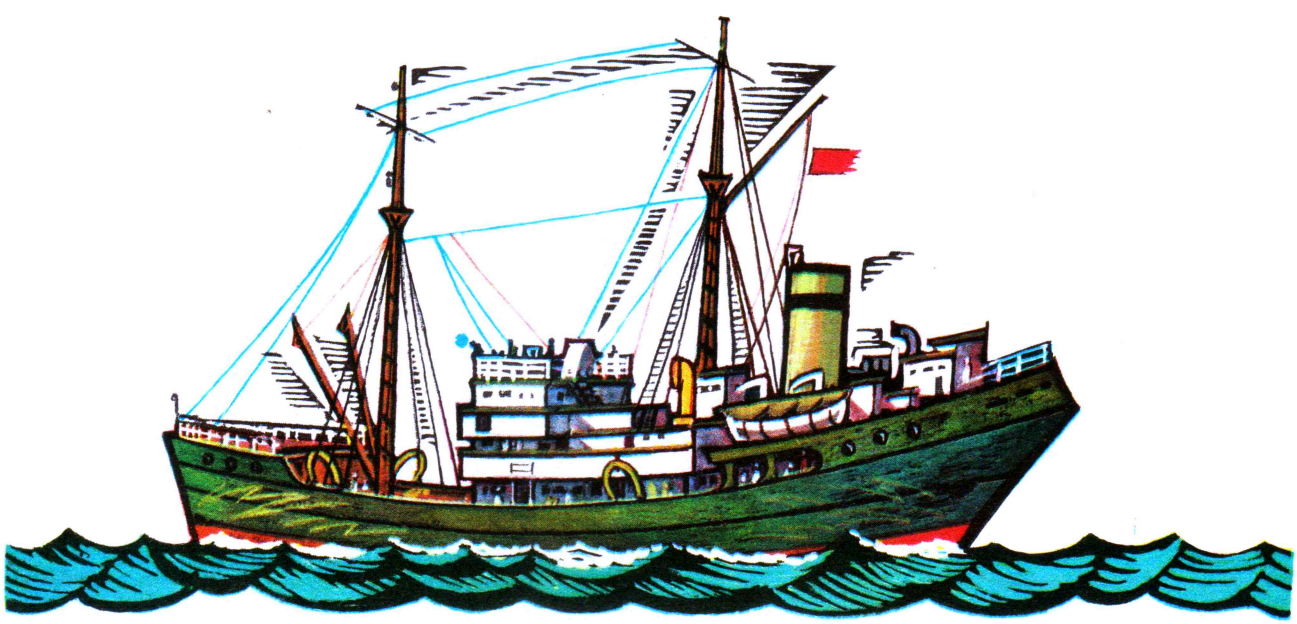
AN IMPOSSIBLE COLLISION

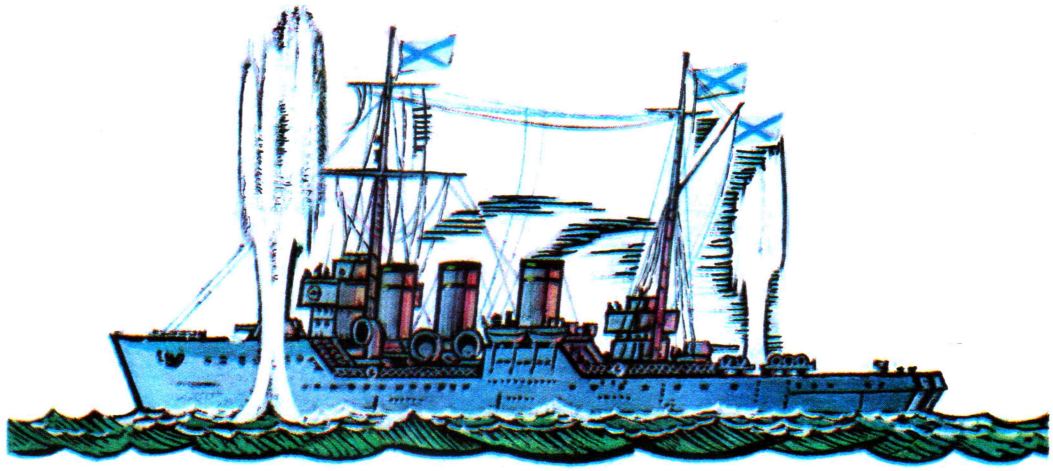
An ocean liner was sailing into the Italian port of Genoa, returning from a long voyage. There had been dangerous shoals and tropical storms on the way, but the ship had arrived in port safely. It was now moving slowly towards its berth.

Meanwhile, a locomotive was chugging along the rails on the pier. Something went wrong and it rolled off the tracks. It continued on for a few feet and stopped at the very edge of the pier.

And the huge ocean liner collided with the locomotive! The huge hole in the ship's prow took many months to repair.

The locomotive was badly battered, too. It had paid dearly for running off the tracks.





THE BLUE DESTROYER

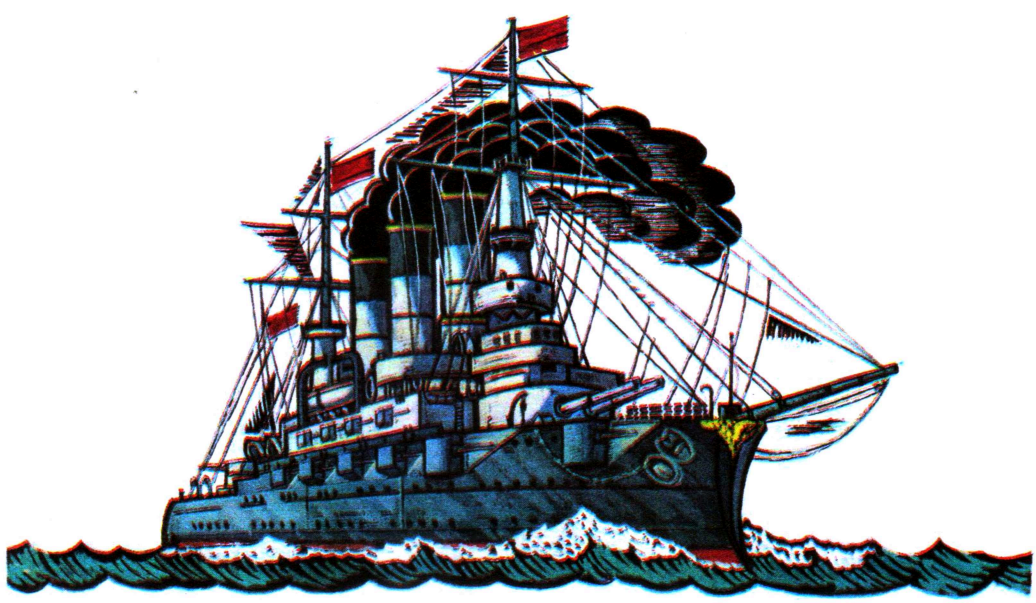
Blue, black and white paint are mixed together to get a battleship grey.

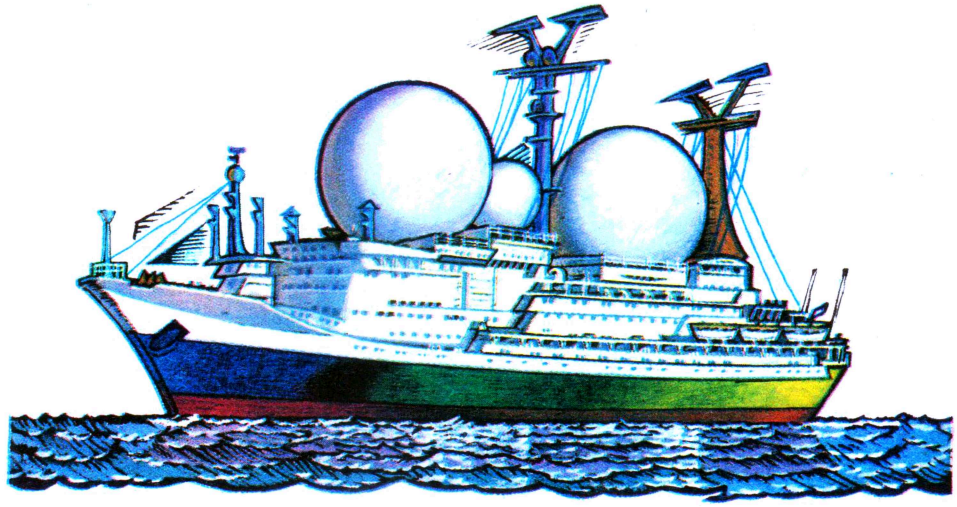
However, when the destroyer *Tashkent* was painted too much blue was added and so the ship turned out blue.

When the nazis surrounded Sevastopol during the war the *Tashkent* was to evacuate the wounded and the women and children from the besieged city to the safety of the Caucasus.

Nazi planes circled overhead all day long. The black crosses on their wings dipped low over the water. There were racks of black bombs under their wings. The planes were searching for the *Tashkent.* The fascists knew that it would take the destroyer a day and a night to reach safety.

When it turned dark the planes flew off, but they returned at the crack of dawn the next morning. However, they could not locate the *Tashkent.* The blue destroyer was the fastest ship in the Black Sea Fleet. It had covered the distance to the Caucasus in one night.





THE SHIP OF THE REVOLUTION

The beautiful embankments in Leningrad are dotted with bronze and granite statues and monuments. When it snows the snow lies like a white mantle on the shoulders of the statues.

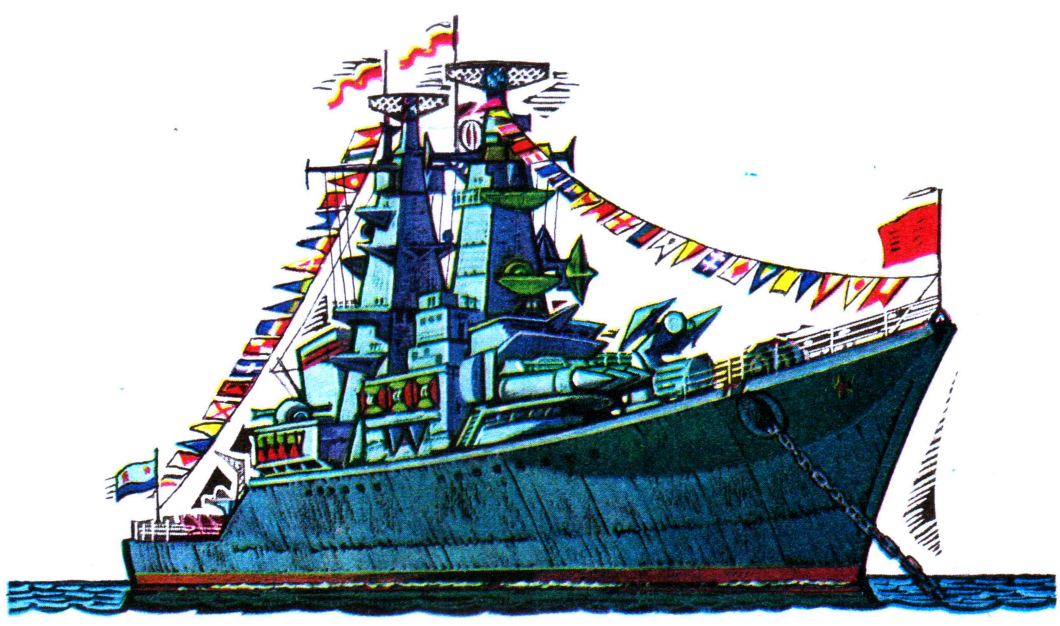
There is one monument in Leningrad that is unlike any other. It is the battleship *Aurora,* which is permanently moored in the Neva River.

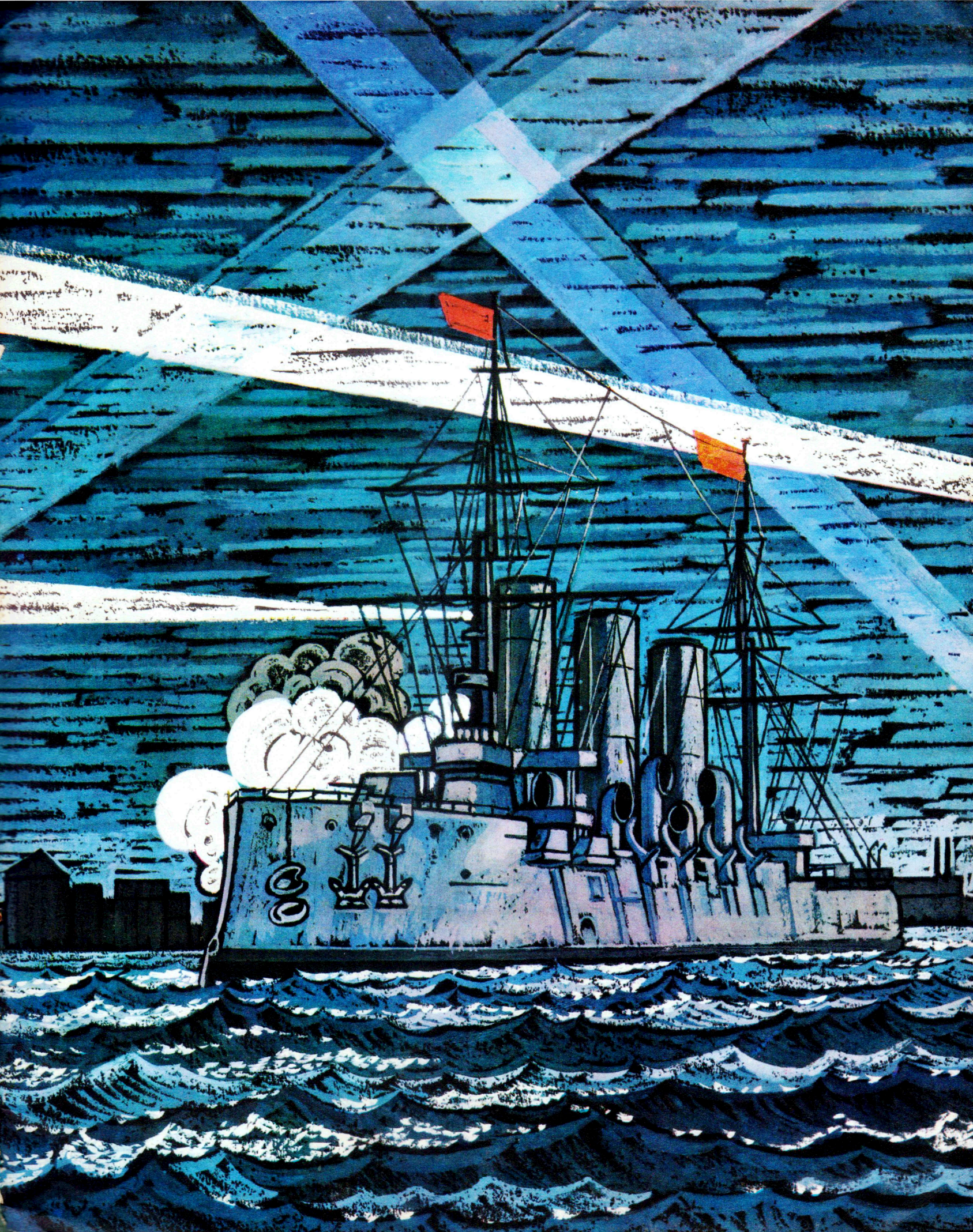
When the October Revolution began the *Aurora* sailed up the Neva and trained its guns on the Winter Palace, an enemy stronghold. The salvo fired by the *Aurora* was a signal to attack the Winter Palace.

There is always a crowd on the embankment nearby, where people come to see the legendary ship.

Across the river is the Winter Palace. It has been turned into a museum.

The crew of the *Aurora* is now made up of young naval cadets.





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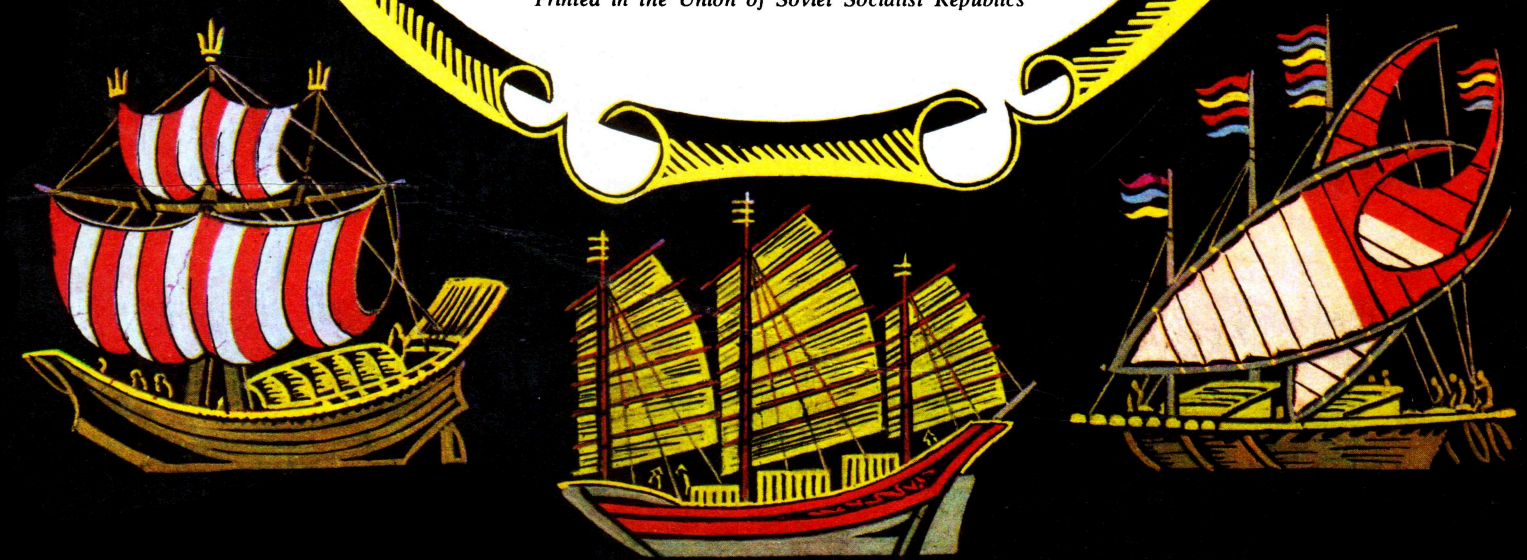
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